

Keeping Track of Student Progress with Portfolios Audio Cloze Activity Page

I'm Susan Zoll. Currently, I am the director of an Early Reading First 2 program that we have here at Ready to Learn, Providence, and I am the early literacy coach for Early Reading First 1 .

Personal Literacy Plans, or PLPs, were developed to satisfy two purposes. The first purpose was to assist teachers in their understanding of data created from formal assessments. When scores from PALS Pre-K and PPVT were initially shared with teachers, the results were not readily understood. So we developed a plan to separate each child's score as it pertains to sections of these formal assessments. Now teachers could identify individual literacy-related trends in their classrooms and plan for them.

The second purpose was to guide teachers in monitoring students' progress. Using the PLP, teachers could now track not only how many letters a child recognized, but also which letters. The lesson planning became more specific and, therefore, more useful to the child's learning. PLPs aren't an assessment tool. They are a monitoring progress tool, and for planning instruction, they help to streamline teachers' efforts when planning for literacy instruction. And they also help with differentiation of activities for classrooms.

So we keep many forms of documentation—audio recordings, portfolios, photo archives, children's print work. When we focus on oral language development, we've requested that teachers document conversations with audio recordings. Transcripts are then made of conversations and additional analysis is used to inform our instruction. For some teachers, transcribing an entire conversation was a daunting task so we individualized the task by suggesting that

they transcribe excerpts of the conversations so they could analyze the language sample. This put teachers in a learning curve about valuing language samples, which was a goal.

Some guiding questions in our analysis could be: “Could the child retell a story?” “Did the child use newly learned vocabulary correctly?” “Did the teacher engage in dialogue or conversation with the child or was it merely functional, such as, ‘Go and line up at the door’?”

For children’s portfolios, these are an ongoing, integral part of PLPs. Children’s work samples, informal assessments, photographs, etc., are the necessary elements of informing teachers where the child is on the literacy continuum. The PLP is the placeholder of these materials. By filling in activities accomplished and children’s success in each of the subtopics such as letter recognition, letter sounds, rhymes—we now have at a glance information about each child’s literacy development.

Photo archives may be used to document children’s learning as well as teachers’ learning. As coaches and mentors we try to capture key elements that represent growth. Often with these photographs we will include a summary of what was learned. The most important element is that we then share this document with the child or teacher. Teachers, coaches, mentors, we all use them on an ongoing basis to record literacy activities and children’s learning. Using this at a glance, ease of knowing where any individual child is in their literacy development, a teacher can see something of their own practice even when reflecting on the PLPs. To many teachers as they fill out these forms, they see how they rely pretty much on upper and lowercase alphabet letter recognition

activities. But now it shows them that they need to provide other opportunities for children, certainly like in the areas of letter sounds and rhyming.

They're useful for student reflection also because we review PLPs with children, and certainly the ones who have an interest. It appears when children are invited to reflect on their own learning, it further engages the child to continue with similar activities. So when children are using these learning opportunities to provide reinforcement, mastery of skills, and confidence, we have incorporated into our monthly professional development trainings—we ask teachers to bring three at a time, we don't want to overwhelm them—so we ask teachers to bring three PLPs every month at our formal professional development trainings. And then we review them and we try to make sure that they have three different PLPs all of the time, so, three different children that we're reflecting on. And it's really been a very step-by-step basis that we look at them and try to help teachers to work with them.